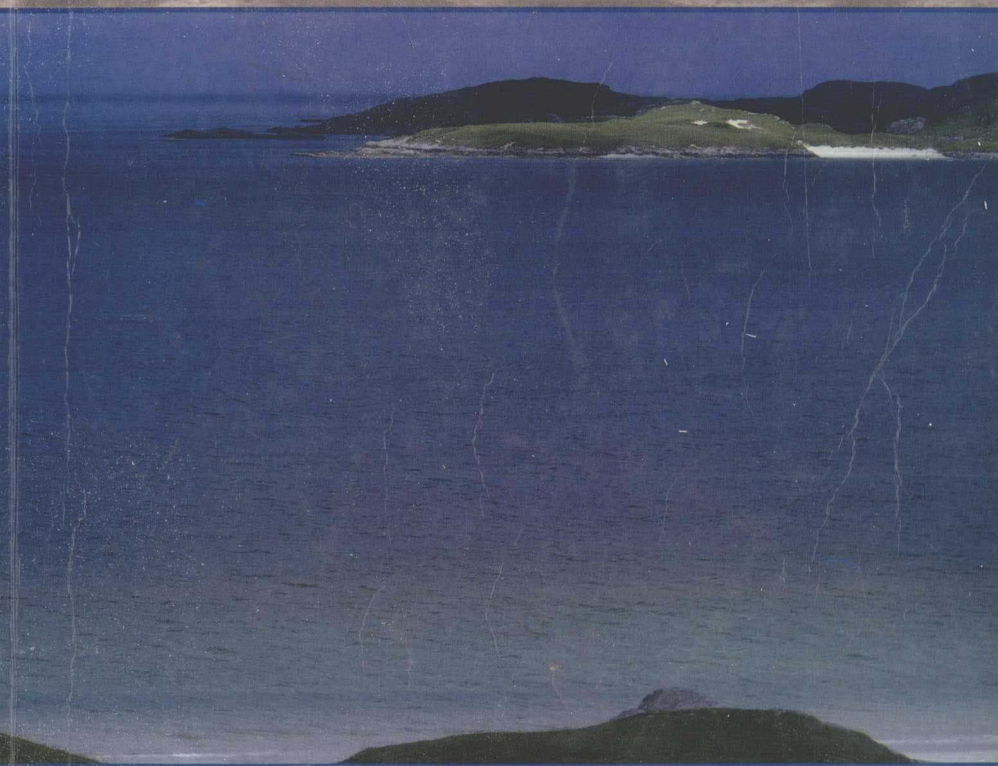


THE **CALLING** OF **KINDRED**

Poems from the English-speaking world



Edited by Adrian Barlow

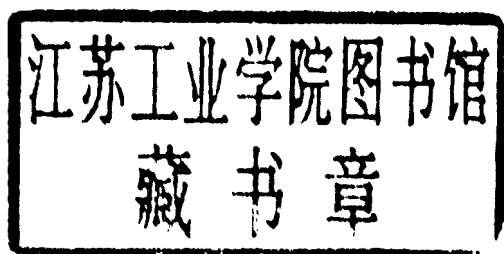
CAMBRIDGE

The Calling of Kind

Poems from the English-speaking world

edited by

ADRIAN BARLOW



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CONTENTS

Introduction	5
List of poems: Sections A–E	7
Section A	11
Section B	34
Section C	60
Section D	81
Section E	102
The poets and their poems	128
Index of first lines	172
Acknowledgements	175

INTRODUCTION

Poems find their way into anthologies for varied reasons. Like most anthologies, *The Calling of Kindred* contains a mixture of the well-known and the unfamiliar, and the poems here have all been chosen because I have found them memorable – that is, worth remembering. Poems, after all, are the most portable of all forms of art. They may be as short as two lines or as long as *Paradise Lost*; but phrases, lines, stanzas and whole poems can be carried in the memory for a lifetime.

I have chosen poems from the time of Shakespeare to the present day; my aim has been to put a selection of ‘classic’ poems (and some less well-known poems by ‘classic’ authors) alongside poems that are not yet classic at all. I have done this both to provide some landmarks for those coming fresh to English poetry and to show how writers throughout the world borrow, share or echo each other’s ideas, forms and images. More than one-third of the poems collected here are by poets who write in English, but are not British-born.

The Calling of Kindred is arranged in five sections, each one containing a mixture of poems from different periods and countries. They are not grouped by theme (although sometimes two or more related poems have deliberately been placed together), but several themes do run strongly through the anthology as a whole: time, memory, and the tension between past and present; love, and the feelings that bind families and generations together; war, conflict and its effect on the survivor; the sense of place, the sense of restlessness and the sense of exile. In the notes, arranged alphabetically by author in the section ‘The poets and their poems’, I offer a number of cross-references to lead readers from one poem to another. There is also a brief introduction to each poet or poem and an explanation of some words and references that may be unfamiliar, particularly to those for whom English is not their home language or culture.

All the poems I have chosen are complete in themselves, so there are no extracts from longer works. It may seem strange that in a collection of English poetry I have included some translations. I have done this because poets have always translated each other’s work, and translations can acquire their own importance in a new language. Thus Ezra Pound’s *Exile’s Letter*, for instance, is a famous and finely crafted poem in its own right. Irina Ratushinskaya’s poetry has

probably had, in the past decade, more influence in English translation than in its original Russian.

In poetry, poets speak to their readers; they also speak to each other. Sometimes this is literally so, as when Coleridge speaks to Charles Lamb in *This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison* or when Eleanor Farjeon addresses her friend Edward Thomas after his death in the First World War. Poets listen to each other, too: in *Old House at Ang Siang Hill* the Singapore poet Arthur Yap remembers the words of the Irish poet W.B. Yeats, and in *The Lying Art* the Australian Peter Porter argues about the nature of poetry with the American Marianne Moore. Sometimes it will be the reader who brings two poets together, hearing echoes of which the poets themselves may have been unaware. When the New Zealand poet Meg Campbell finds delight in the few words of Gaelic she remembers from her Scottish father (*Loch, Black Rock, Beautiful Boat*), she is describing the same language that delighted Wordsworth in *The Solitary Reaper*.

Our kindred are the members of our family, however close or far-flung. Kindred spirits are those with whom we feel we have much in common. Poetry is written, spoken and read in English all round the world, and poets and readers are a diverse but also a closely-knit family. It is very moving to hear the Italian Primo Levi (in *The Survivor*) borrow the voice of the English poet Coleridge's Ancient Mariner to speak for all those who endured the horror of Auschwitz and the Holocaust. I hope users of this anthology (teachers, students and individual readers) will be stirred by other such echoes: it is for this reason that I have borrowed a phrase from the Welsh poet Ruth Bidgood and taken as my title *The Calling of Kindred*.

Adrian Barlow

THE POEMS

Section A

- Fleur Adcock *Instead of an Interview* 11
Richard Aldington *Epilogue to 'Death of a Hero'* 12
Ruth Bidgood *Kindred* 13
John Clare *Signs of Winter* 14
Samuel Taylor Coleridge *This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison* 14
H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) *Oread* 16
George Herbert *Life* 17
Anthony Conran *Elegy for the Welsh Dead, in the Falkland Islands, 1982* 18
Elizabeth Jennings *My Grandmother* 20
Chandran Nair *Grandfather* 21
Rudyard Kipling *The Way Through the Woods* 22
Charles Lamb *The Old Familiar Faces* 23
John Pudney *Landscape: Western Desert* 24
Walter Raleigh *Now What is Love? I Pray Thee Tell* 25
Irina Ratushinskaya *I Will Travel Through the Land* 26
Christina Rossetti *Up-Hill* 27
Percy Bysshe Shelley *Ozymandias* 27
Alfred, Lord Tennyson *The Charge of the Light Brigade* 28
Duncan Forbes *Exile* 30
Bill Manhire *Our Father* 31
Andrew Marvell *The Fair Singer* 32
William Shakespeare *When in Disgrace With Fortune and Men's Eyes* 32
Dylan Thomas *Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night* 33
William Wordsworth *My Heart Leaps Up* 33

Section B

- Arthur Yap *Old House at Ang Siang Hill* 34
W.H. Auden *In Memory of W.B. Yeats* 35
Emily Dickinson *After Great Pain* 37
William Cowper *The Castaway* 38
John Donne *Death Be Not Proud* 40

T.S. Eliot	<i>Rhapsody on a Windy Night</i>	40
Thomas Hardy	<i>Afterwards</i>	43
D.H. Lawrence	<i>Piano</i>	44
Lee Tzu Pheng	<i>Bukit Timah, Singapore</i>	44
Primo Levi	<i>The Survivor</i>	46
John Lyly	<i>My Daphne's Hair is Twisted Gold</i>	46
Gwendolyn MacEwen	<i>The Child Dancing</i>	47
Gabriel Okara	<i>Piano and Drums</i>	48
Sylvia Plath	<i>You're</i>	49
Ezra Pound	<i>In a Station of the Metro</i>	49
Jacques Prévert	<i>To Paint the Portrait of a Bird</i>	50
Isaac Rosenberg	<i>Returning, We Hear the Larks</i>	51
Lucinda Roy	<i>Carousel</i>	52
William Shakespeare	<i>My Mistress' Eyes are Nothing Like the Sun</i>	53
Wallace Stevens	<i>Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird</i>	54
William Wordsworth	<i>The Solitary Reaper</i>	56
Elizabeth Thomas	<i>The Forsaken Wife</i>	57
Elizabeth Tolley	<i>Winter Song</i>	58
W.B. Yeats	<i>An Irish Airman Foresees His Death</i>	59

Section C

Rosemary Dobson	<i>Folding the Sheets</i>	60
Michael Aarons	<i>For Indira Gandhi</i>	61
William Blake	<i>Never Seek to Tell Thy Love</i>	62
Anne Bradstreet	<i>A Letter to her Husband, Absent upon Public Employment</i>	63
Lord Byron	<i>So, We'll Go No More a-Roving</i>	64
Thomas Campion	<i>When Thou Must Home</i>	64
John Donne	<i>The Apparition</i>	65
Walt Whitman	<i>By the Bivouac's Fitful Flame</i>	65
Keith Douglas	<i>Simplify Me When I'm Dead</i>	66
Zulfikar Ghose	<i>Flying over India</i>	67
Thomas Hardy	<i>During Wind and Rain</i>	68
Seamus Heaney	<i>From the Frontier of Writing</i>	69
Robert Herrick	<i>Upon Julia's Clothes</i>	69
A.E. Housman	<i>Is My Team Ploughing?</i>	70
Primo Levi	<i>Shemà</i>	71
W.B. Yeats	<i>He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven</i>	71
Louis MacNeice	<i>Meeting Point</i>	72
Cilla McQueen	<i>Matinal</i>	73

Marianne Moore	<i>Poetry</i>	74
Peter Porter	<i>The Lying Art</i>	75
Ezra Pound	<i>Exile's Letter</i>	76
Anthony Munday	<i>I Serve a Mistress Whiter than the Snow</i>	78
William Shakespeare	<i>Fear No More the Heat o' the Sun</i>	79
Arthur Yap	<i>In Passing</i>	80

Section D

William Blake	<i>The Tiger</i>	81
Meg Campbell	<i>Loch, Black Rock, Beautiful Boat</i>	82
Robert Browning	<i>Memorabilia</i>	83
Margaret Cavendish	<i>A Poet I am Neither Born, Nor Bred</i>	83
C.P. Cavafy	<i>Waiting for the Barbarians</i>	84
Rupert Brooke	<i>Waikiki</i>	85
S.T. Coleridge	<i>Kubla Khan</i>	86
William Cowper	<i>The Poplar-Field</i>	88
U.A. Fanthorpe	<i>Tomorrow and</i>	88
Eleanor Farjeon	<i>Easter Monday</i>	90
Thomas Hardy	<i>Beeny Cliff</i>	90
Robert Frost	<i>The Road Not Taken</i>	91
Nicholas Hasluk	<i>Islands</i>	92
Seamus Heaney	<i>Personal Helicon</i>	93
Ted Hughes	<i>Creation of Fishes</i>	94
Robert Herrick	<i>To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time</i>	95
D.H. Lawrence	<i>Bavarian Gentians</i>	95
Charlotte Mew	<i>The Trees are Down</i>	96
Edward Thomas	<i>The Owl</i>	97
John Milton	<i>On Time</i>	98
Rajendran Arumugam	<i>The Table</i>	99
Christina Rossetti	<i>Italia, Io Ti Saluto!</i>	100
Duncan Campbell Scott	<i>The Sailor's Sweetheart</i>	100
Dambudzo Marechera	<i>The Coin of Moonshine</i>	101

Section E

William Carlos Williams	<i>Spring and All</i>	102
William Blake	<i>The Clod and the Pebble</i>	103
Edmund Blunden	<i>The Cottage at Chigasaki</i>	103
W.H. Auden	<i>As I Walked Out One Evening</i>	104
Margaret Atwood	<i>Woman Skating</i>	106
Elizabeth Brewster	<i>Where I Come From</i>	107

Emily Brontë	<i>High Waving Heather</i>	108
Basil Bunting	<i>The Orotava Road</i>	108
Gillian Clarke	<i>The Water-Diviner</i>	110
Alan Brownjohn	<i>In This City</i>	110
Abraham Cowley	<i>Of My Self</i>	111
Alison Croggon	<i>Domestic Art</i>	112
Heng Siok Tian	<i>Words on a Turn-table</i>	114
Keith Douglas	<i>Behaviour of Fish in an Egyptian Tea Garden</i>	115
Chenjerai Hove	<i>The Red Hills of Home</i>	116
John Keats	<i>When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be</i>	118
Philip Larkin	<i>The Whitsun Weddings</i>	118
Christopher Marlowe	<i>Come Live With Me and Be My Love</i>	121
Walter Raleigh	<i>Answer to Marlowe</i>	122
Stevie Smith	<i>Not Waving but Drowning</i>	123
Duncan Campbell Scott	<i>Thoughts</i>	123
Edward Thomas	<i>Words</i>	124
Walt Whitman	<i>The Dalliance of the Eagles</i>	125
D.H. Lawrence	<i>Kangaroo</i>	126

SECTION A

Instead of an Interview

The hills. I told them; and water, and the clear air
(not yielding to more journalistic probings);
and a river or two, I could say, and certain bays
and ah, those various and incredible hills . . .

And all my family still in the one city
within walking distances of each other
through streets I could follow blind. My school was gone
and half my Thorndon smashed for the motorway
but every corner revealed familiar settings
for the dreams I'd not bothered to remember – 10
ingrained; ingrown; incestuous: like the country.

And another city offering me a lover
and quite enough friends to be going on with:
bookshops: galleries: gardens: fish in the sea:
lemons and passionfruit growing free as the bush.
Then the bush itself: and the wild grand south:
and wooden houses in occasional special towns.

And not a town or a city I could live in.
Home, as I explained to a weeping niece,
home is London; and England, Ireland, Europe. 20
I have come home with a suitcase full of stones –
of shells and pebbles, pottery, pieces of bark:
here they lie around the floor of my study
as I telephone a cable 'Safely home'
and moments later, thinking of my dears,
wish the over-resonant word cancelled:
'Arrived safely' would have been clear enough,
neutral, kinder. But another loaded word
creeps up now to interrogate me.
By going back to look, after thirteen years, 30
have I made myself for the first time an exile?

Fleur Adcock

Epilogue to 'Death of a Hero'

Eleven years after the fall of Troy,
We, the old men – some of us nearly forty –
Met and talked on the sunny rampart
Over our wine, while the lizards scuttled
In dusty grass, and the crickets chirred.

Some bared their wounds;
Some spoke of the thirst, dry in the throat,
And the heart-beat, in the din of battle;
Some spoke of intolerable sufferings,
The brightness gone from their eyes 10
And the grey already thick in their hair.

And I sat a little apart
From the garrulous talk and old memories,
And I heard a boy of twenty
Say petulantly to a girl, seizing her arm:
'Oh, come away, why do you stand there
Listening open-mouthed to the talk of old men?
Haven't you heard enough of Troy and Achilles?
Why should they bore us for ever
With an old quarrel and the names of dead men 20
We never knew, and dull forgotten battles?'

And he drew her away,
And she looked back and laughed
As he spoke more contempt of us,
Being now out of hearing.

And I thought of the graves by desolate Troy
And the beauty of many young men now dust,
And the long agony, and how useless it all was.
And the talk still clashed about me
Like the meeting of blade and blade.

And as they two moved further away
He put an arm about her, and kissed her;
And afterwards I heard their gay distant laughter.

Signs of Winter

The cat runs races with her tail. The dog
Leaps o'er the orchard hedge and knarls the grass.
The swine run round and grunt and play with straw,
Snatching out hasty mouthfuls from the stack.

Sudden upon the elm-tree tops the crow
Unceremonious visit pays and croaks.
Then swoops away. From mossy barn the owl
Bobs hasty out – wheels round and, scared as soon,
As hastily retires. The ducks grow wild
And from the muddy pond fly up and wheel 10
A circle round the village and soon, tired,
Plunge in the pond again. The maids in haste
Snatch from the orchard hedge the mizzled clothes
And laughing hurry in to keep them dry.

John Clare

This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison

In the June of 1797, some long-expected Friends paid a visit to the author's cottage; and on the morning of their arrival, he met with an accident, which disabled him from walking during the whole time of their stay. One evening, when they had left him for a few hours, he composed the following lines in the garden-bower.

Well, they are gone, and here must I remain,
This lime-tree bower my prison! I have lost
Beauties and feelings, such as would have been
Most sweet to my remembrance even when age
Had dimmed mine eyes to blindness! They, meanwhile,
Friends, whom I never more may meet again,
On springy heath, along the hill-top edge,
Wander in gladness, and wind down, perchance,
To that still roaring dell, of which I told;
The roaring dell, o'erwooded, narrow, deep, 10
And only speckled by the mid-day sun;
Where its slim trunk the ash from rock to rock
Flings arching like a bridge; – that branchless ash,

Unsunned and damp, whose few poor yellow leaves
Ne'er tremble in the gale, yet tremble still,
Fanned by the water-fall! and there my friends
Behold the dark green file of long lank weeds,
That all at once (a most fantastic sight!)
Still nod and drip beneath the dripping edge
Of the blue clay-stone.

Now, my friends emerge 20
Beneath the wide wide Heaven – and view again
The many-steepled tract magnificent
Of hilly fields and meadows, and the sea,
With some fair bark, perhaps, whose sails light up
The slip of smooth clear blue betwixt two Isles
Of purple shadow! Yes! they wander on
In gladness all; but thou, methinks, most glad,
My gentle-hearted Charles! for thou hast pined
And hungered after Nature, many a year,
In the great City pent, winning thy way 30
With sad yet patient soul, through evil and pain
And strange calamity! Ah! slowly sink
Behind the western ridge, thou glorious sun!
Shine in the slant beams of the sinking orb,
Ye purple heath-flowers! richlier burn, ye clouds!
Live in the yellow light, ye distant groves!
And kindle, thou blue ocean! So my Friend
Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood,
Silent with swimming sense; yea, gazing round
On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem 40
Less gross than bodily; and of such hues
As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes
Spirits perceive his presence.

A delight
Comes sudden on my heart, and I am glad
As I myself were there! Nor in this bower,
This little lime-tree bower, have I not marked
Much that has soothed me. Pale beneath the blaze
Hung the transparent foliage; and I watched
Some broad and sunny leaf, and loved to see
The shadow of the leaf and stem above 50
Dappling its sunshine! And that walnut-tree

Was richly tinged, and a deep radiance lay
 Full on the ancient ivy, which usurps
 Those fronting elms, and now, with blackest mass
 Makes their dark branches gleam a lighter hue
 Through the late twilight: and though now the bat
 Wheels silent by, and not a swallow twitters,
 Yet still the solitary humble bee
 Sings in the bean-flower! Henceforth I shall know
 That Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure; 60
 No plot so narrow, be but Nature there,
 No waste so vacant, but may well employ
 Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart
 Awake to Love and Beauty! and sometimes
 'Tis well to be bereft of promised good,
 That we may lift the Soul, and contemplate
 With lively joy the joys we cannot share.
 My gentle-hearted Charles! When the last rook
 Beat its straight path along the dusky air
 Homewards, I blest it! deeming, its black wing 70
 (Now a dim speck, now vanishing in light)
 Had crossed the mighty orb's dilated glory,
 While thou stood'st gazing; or when all was still,
 Flew creaking o'er thy head, and had a charm
 For thee, my gentle-hearted Charles, to whom
 No sound is dissonant which tells of Life.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Oread

Whirl up, sea –
 Whirl your pointed pines.
 Splash your great pines
 On our rocks.
 Hurl your green over us –
 Cover us with your pools of fir.

H.D. (Hilda Doolittle)